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## THE PROVINCE OF SOCIOLOGY.

No science is at this moment in greater need of descriptive definition than sociology. A rapidly-growing body of coördinated knowledge is called by this name. An increasing number of earnest thinkers in England, Germany, France, Belgium, Italy and the United States are known as sociologists. What exactly is the province of this science? What are the underlying conceptions of sociological theory, and what is the spirit of sociological investigation?

To answer these questions we must inquire, first, how sociology is related to other bodies of knowledge that are concerned with phenomena of human society.

One group, known collectively as the political sciences, includes political economy, the theory of the state and the philosophy of law. Another group includes the theories of pauperism, crime and other social maladies. Yet another group includes the comparative study of religions, comparative ethics, comparative philology and archæology. Does sociology include these various departments of investigation? If so, is it anything more than a collective name for the sum of the social sciences? Assuming that it is more than a collective name, does it discard the theoretical principles of the special social sciences, or does it adopt and coördinate them?

If sociology deals by a method of its own with the same subject matter that the special social sciences deal with, but without including their generalizations, how does it differ from social statistics? Statistics professes to survey the whole field of social relationships, investigating both uniformities and details as far as this is possible by numerical methods. In so far as there can be a comprehensive

social science that is not inclusive of special science, it is statistics.

If, on the other hand, sociology includes many or all of the generalizations as well as the subject matter of the special social sciences, and yet, having a unity of its own, is more than their sum, how does it differ from history, as history is now conceived by philosophical historians? History goes even farther than statistics in occupying itself with all social phenomena whatsoever, because it is limited to no one method. It uses any or all methods. It is concerned alike with the uniformities and the details of human events. It studies them in their abstract relations and in their concrete phases ; in their causes and in their effects. It takes up into itself the scientific laws of economics and of political science ; of jurisprudence ; of philanthropy and penology ; of comparative religions, philology and art ; for the life of nations must be interpreted from every point of view. History as now pursued is a comprehensive social science. If sociology also is such a science, wherein does it differ from philosophical history ?

The answer to these questions is, that if the word be used in the broadest sense, sociology comprehends all social science, including statistics and history ; just as biology, in the broadest sense of that word, comprehends all the sciences of life, including botany and zoölogy, morphology and physiology, embryology and histology. But there is a narrower sense in which the word biology is used, and we must give a restricted meaning to the word sociology to accurately describe the particular division of knowledge that we are here concerned with. Specifically, the word biology is now understood to mean that description of the general properties of living matter and those fundamental principles of the phenomena of life that are the basis of subsequent study in more special branches of biological science.<sup>1</sup> A specific meaning precisely similar must be given to the word sociology. An analysis of the

<sup>1</sup> Sedgwick and Wilson's *Biology*, p. 7.

general characteristics of social phenomena, with a formulation of the general laws of social evolution, must be made the basis of special study in all departments of social science. It is upon just this work that sociologists are now concentrating their efforts, and for their results there can be no other name than sociology.

In this narrower sense, then, sociology is not the inclusive, but the fundamental social science. It is not the sum of the social sciences, but the groundwork, in which they find a common basis. Its far-reaching principles are the postulates of special sciences, and as such they coördinate and bind together the whole body of social generalizations in a large scientific unity. Not concerned with the detail of social phenomena, sociology stands at the opposite end of the scale of social science from history. It is the intermediate science between the organic sciences on the one hand, and the politico-historical sciences on the other. Sociology rests on biology and psychology. The special social sciences rest on sociology.

The further definition of sociology consists in showing how it is differentiated from the sciences below it, psychology, biology and sciences of inorganic aggregates. To do this we must look somewhat carefully at the objects that it attempts to study and explain.

Intermediate between biological and historical sciences, sociology is concerned with phenomena that are at once organic, in the physical sense of the word, psychological and historical. There is but one class of objects in the universe that exhibit such phenomena. The human population of the earth is distributed into ethnical groups, differing greatly in size and in the degree and complexity of their activities, and variously known as hordes, tribes and nations. In each there are certain essential activities of reproduction, sustentation and defense. In many of the small, and in all of the larger, groups the activities are differentiated into specialized labors and vocations, while corresponding to the division of labor there is a complex social structure of coördinated relationships. The more

highly specialized the activities and relationships are, the more dependent becomes each kind of labor and each social relation upon all of the others; the more does the whole group suffer when any activity or relation is impaired or disturbed. Natural societies, so conceived, are the objects of sociological study.

As an organic whole a natural society is, of course, in one of its aspects a physical aggregate. Physically speaking, its component units are masses of living matter. If we show how, merely as a physical aggregate, a society differs from all other physical aggregates in the universe, we mark off sociology on its physical side from other sciences. If, then, we show how as an organic aggregate a society differs from those aggregates of microscopic cells that compose plant and animal organisms, we differentiate sociology from biology.

The first task was accomplished by Lester F. Ward in his "Dynamic Sociology." It is there pointed out that the matter of the cosmos is found in three degrees of aggregation. Inorganic bodies are products of a primary aggregation, their unit being the molecule. Organic bodies are products of a secondary aggregation,<sup>1</sup> their unit being the cell, itself a product of a primary aggregation of molecules. Societies differ from all other bodies in being the sole products of a tertiary aggregation, their units—living beings—being themselves products of a secondary aggregation.

As products of a tertiary aggregation, societies necessarily differ from merely biostatic organisms in being what Mr. Spencer has called superorganic. To show in detail just what this difference involves is a large undertaking. It has been fairly well accomplished in Mr. Spencer's "Principles of Sociology," Schäffle's "Bau und Leben des Socialen Körpers," and the "Introduction à la Sociologie," by Guillaume de Greef.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Secondary, perhaps, in a rather broad sense. Late investigations point to the recognition of a number of products intermediate between molecule and cell.

<sup>2</sup> This important work is in three parts; the first, published in 1886, is on *Eléments*; the second, which appeared in 1889, is on *Functions et Organes*; the third, now in preparation, will be on *Structure Générale*.

But what of the differentiation of sociology from psychology? Whatever else a society is, it is a phenomenon of conscious association, and the field of sociology is certainly not marked out until we know whether there is any reason in the nature of things for classifying the psychological phenomena of society apart from those of individuals.

Right here, I think, has been the really serious gap in sociological theory. So far as I have been able to discover, no sociologist has distinctly stated this problem and tried to solve it. Let me indicate in the briefest terms so much of my own view on this point as is necessary to round out the conception of sociological science.

Psychology is concerned with the associations and dissociations of the elements of conscious personality. How sensations are associated and dissociated in perception, how perceptions are associated and dissociated in imagination and in thought, how thought, feeling and impulse are coördinated in that marvelous composite, the individual personality, are problems for psychology to state and, if it can, to solve. But the phenomena of conscious association do not end with the appearance of individual personality. They are then only engendered. Individual personalities, as units, become the elements of that vastly more extensive and intricate association of man with man and group with group, which creates the varied relations of social life. A society is, therefore, on its conscious side, a super-psychical product, just as, on its physical side, it is super-organic and a product of tertiary aggregation.

If we can discover the meaning of this fact we shall get at the essential characteristic of social phenomena and know definitely what is the specific object of sociological study.

The conscious association of individuals, when it is deliberate or of purpose, grows out of their thoughts and feelings. It is an objective result of inward states. The social relations and activities built up by association are therefore

outward products of inward states. This fact is so related to the accepted definitions of biology and psychology as to afford us one of the distinguishing marks of sociology that we seek. In biology we study an adjustment of the physical changes within an organism to external relations that are comparatively few, simple and constant.<sup>1</sup> In psychology we study an adjustment of the conscious changes within an organism to external relations of wide extent in time and space and of the utmost complexity. In both biology and psychology we regard phenomena within the organism as effects, and relations in the environment as causes. The moment we turn to social phenomena we discover that activities within the organism have become conspicuous as causes. They have created a wonderful structure of external relationships, and have even modified the fauna and flora and the surface of the earth within their environment. The progressive adjustment between internal and external relations has become reciprocal.

By this fact sociology is broadly marked off from psychology. To make the distinction definite, however, we must take note of an essential element in the scientific conception of social relations not yet mentioned. That element is a perception of the end subserved by social organization.

"There can be no true conception of a structure," says Mr. Spencer, "without a true conception of its function. To understand how an organization originated and developed it is requisite to understand the need subserved at the outset and afterward."<sup>2</sup> Until we understand what has been the need subserved, at the outset and afterward, by social relations, there remains a fatal gap in sociological theory. The only way to that understanding is through a clear perception of the reciprocal determination of the individual consciousness and its social environment. Individual thought and feeling are projected into social relations

<sup>1</sup> So general a definition must leave much unexpressed—the phenomena of heredity, for example.

<sup>2</sup> "Principles of Sociology," Vol. II, § 583.

because social relations react favorably on individual thought and feeling. Not only are individual personalities—as constituted by that association of ideas and feelings that psychology studies—the units of the wider conscious association that we call social, but only through the wider association, emotional, intellectual and volitional, is the higher evolution of personality effected.<sup>1</sup>

It is conscious association with his fellows that develops man's moral nature. To the exchange of thought and feeling all literature and philosophy, all religious consciousness and public polity, are due, and it is the reaction of literature and philosophy, of worship and polity, on the mind of each new generation that develops its type of personality. Accordingly, we may say that the function of social organization, which the sociologist must keep persistently in view, is the evolution of personality, through ever higher stages and broader ranges, into that wide inclusion and to that high ideal quality that we name humanity. At every step the sociological task is the double one—to know how social relations are evolved, and how, being evolved, they react on the development of personality.<sup>2</sup>

It remains to describe sociology by its scientific motive and characteristics. Lying between the organic and the historical sciences and partaking of the nature of both, sociology has a spirit of its own and a distinctive point of view. It has been developed under peculiar conditions and by men who have felt the full force of an impulse that, in our day, has revolutionized the science of the world for all time to come. The evolutionary doctrine has penetrated the organic sciences through and through. The law of natural selection and the conception of life as a process of

<sup>1</sup> George Henry Lewes claimed to be the first psychologist to distinctly recognize and state the part played by the social factor in the evolution of intellect and conscience. See "Problems of Life and Mind," First Series, Vol. I, p. 140, and "The Study of Psychology," p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> The work of interpreting thought, morals, art and religion from the sociological point of view had been hopefully begun by the lamented M. Guyau. His *L'Art au Point de Vue Sociologique* and *Éducation et Hérité, étude sociologique* are especially suggestive.



adjustment of the organism to its environment have become the very core of the biology and psychology of to-day. It was inevitable that the evolutionary philosophy should be extended to embrace the phenomena of human life. The science that had traced life from protoplasm to man could not stop there. It must take cognizance of the ethnical groups, the natural societies of men, and of all the phenomena that they exhibit, and inquire whether these things also be not products of the universal evolution. Accordingly, we find not only in the earlier writings of Mr. Spencer—afterward the real founder of true sociology—but also in those of Darwin and Haeckel, suggestions of an evolutionist account of social relations. These hints were not of themselves a sociology. For this other factors, derived from history and political science were needed.<sup>1</sup> But they sufficed to show where the ground lines of the new science must lie; to reveal its fundamental conceptions, and to demonstrate that the sociologist must be not only historian, economist and statistician, but biologist and psychologist as well. It is, in fact, on these lines and through the labors of such men, that modern sociology has taken shape. It is an interpretation of human society in terms of natural causation. It refuses to think of humanity as outside of the cosmic process, and a law unto itself. Sociology is an attempt to account for the origin, growth, structure and activities of human society by the operation of physical, biogenetic, and psychogenetic causes, working together in a process of evolution.

Unfortunately there is an impression, shared by many students of the political sciences, that sociology under-rates the importance of the volitional factors in social causation and misconceives their distinctive qualities. The part played by these factors is so conspicuous that a

<sup>1</sup>Systematic treatises in which the sociological problem has been approached from the historical side, but in very different ways, are: *Der Rassenkampf*, by Dr. Ludwig Gumplowicz, Innsbruck, 1883, and *Eléments de Sociologie*, by Combes de Lestrade, Paris, 1889.

student who approaches the problem from one side only can easily fall into the habit of thinking of them as underived, independent causes, and it is out of this unscientific habit that misconceptions of sociology have grown. The sociologist deals with phenomena of volition at every step. In fact, as we have seen, they are central points, about which all the other phases of social change are grouped. More than this; the sociologist deals not only with causes that are not merely physical, but with many that are not merely psychical. They are as much more complex than the merely psychical as the psychical are more complex than the merely physical. They are sociological—products of social evolution itself—and the true sociologist wastes no time on attempts to explain all that is human by environment apart from history.

The real question, therefore, is not on the existence or the importance of volitional and distinctively sociological causes. It is whether these are underived from simpler phenomena than themselves, and undetermined by processes of the physical and organic world. To this question the answer of sociology is an unqualified negative. Sociology is planted squarely on those new conceptions of nature—natural causation and natural law—that have grown up in scientific minds in connection with doctrines of evolution and the conservation of energy.<sup>1</sup> These conceptions, as the working hypotheses of physical and organic science, are totally unlike those old metempirical notions that made natural law an entity, endowed it with omnipotence, and set it up in a world of men and things to govern them. Natural laws are simply unchanging relations among forces, be they physical, psychical or social. A natural cause is simply one that is at the same time an effect. In the universe as known to science there are no independent, unrelated, uncaused causes. By natural causation, therefore, the scientific man means a process in which every cause is

<sup>1</sup> Conceptions not all found even in so recent a work as the *Logic of J. S. Mill*, but set forth clearly by Lewes, in "*Problems of Life and Mind*," First Series.

itself an effect of antecedent causes ; in which every action is at the same time a reaction. Nature is but the totality of related things, in which every change has been caused by antecedent change and will itself cause subsequent change, and in which, among all changes, there are relations of co-existence and sequence that are themselves unchanging.

In this mighty but exquisite system man is indeed a variable, but not an independent variable. He is a function of innumerable variables. In a world of endless change he acts upon that world, but only because he is of that world. His volition is a true cause, but only because it is a true effect. Therefore, while affirming the reality of sociological forces that are distinctly different from merely biological and merely physical forces, the sociologist is careful to add that they are different only as products are different from factors ; only as protoplasm is different from certain quantities of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen and carbon ; only as an organism and its coördinated activities are different from a group of nucleated cells having activities that are unrelated. Recognizing that society is an organism that acts in definite ways upon its members, he looks beyond the superficial aspect and finds that all social action is in fact a reaction, and, as such, definitely limited and conditioned. He finds nowhere a social force that has not been evolved in a physical-organic process, nor one that is not at every moment conditioned by physical facts. He sees in constant operation that marvelous product of individual wills, the collective or group will, in which Austin found the source of political sovereignty ; but he sees also, what no jurist before Darwin's day could know, how inexorably the sovereign will is conditioned by natural selection. The group, like the individual, can will what it wills ; but what it does will is determined by conditions that man did not create, and whether the group will keep on willing this thing or that thing, will depend on whether the thing willed conduces

to social survival. If it does not, there is presently an end of social willing along those lines. It is in this truth that the sociologist discerns the essential significance of the much befogged doctrine of natural rights. Natural rights, as defined by Quesnay, have gone to the limbo of outworn creeds; not so those natural rights that sociology is just beginning to disclose. Legal rights are rights sanctioned by the law-making power; moral rights are rights sanctioned by the conscience of the community; natural rights are rights enforced by natural selection operating in the sphere of social relations; and in the long run there can be neither legal nor moral rights not grounded in natural rights as thus defined.<sup>1</sup>

If the social will is conditioned by natural selection, not less is the power to convert will into deed conditioned by the conservation of energy. Enormous as the social energy is, it is at any moment a definite quantity. Every foot-pound of it has been taken up from the physical environment, and no transmutations of form can increase the amount. What is used in one way is absolutely withdrawn from other modes of expenditure. Let the available energies of the environment be wasted or in any way diminished, the social activity must diminish too. The evolution of new relationships of conscious association, and the accompanying development of personality, will be checked.

Thus our definition of sociology as an explanation of

<sup>1</sup> I am not trying to rehabilitate an old idea in a new phraseology. I reject the old idea, and with it that use of the word *natural*, imposed on political philosophy by Rousseau, which identifies the natural exclusively with the *primitive*; a use now banished from biology and psychology, but inexcusably retained in the political sciences by many German economists and jurists, as if *natural* were a word of no broader meaning than *natal*. In scientific nomenclature *natural* has become much more nearly identical with *normal*. In its absolute scientific sense the natural is that which exists in virtue of its part in a cosmic system of mutually determining activities; hence, in a relative and narrower sense it is that which is, on the whole, in harmony with the conditions of its existence. The unnatural is on the way to dissolution or extinction. I have been at some pains to make these points clear, because I am sure that the social sciences will be seriously hampered in their progress until they get rid of those mediæval conceptions of nature that the organic sciences threw over a good while ago.

social phenomena in terms of natural causation, becomes somewhat more explicit. Specifically, it is an interpretation in terms of psychical activity, organic adjustment, natural selection and conservation of energy. As such, it may be less than a demonstrative science, if the experimental sciences be taken as the standard; but we cannot admit that it is only a descriptive science, as contended by those French sociologists who hold closely to the philosophy of Comte.<sup>1</sup> It is strictly an explanatory science, fortifying induction by deduction, and referring effects to veritable causes.

Moreover, when rightly apprehended, sociology has a perfect scientific unity. The conceptions here presented transcend the old Comtist division into two sharply defined parts, one dealing with social statics, the other with social dynamics.<sup>2</sup> Structure can no longer be studied in any organic science apart from function, nor function apart from structure, for we know that at every stage activity determines form; and form, activity. The sociologist refuses to sunder in theory what nature has joined in fact. He centres his attention on a moving equilibrium.

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<sup>1</sup> See especially de Roberty *La Sociologie*, second edition. Paris, 1886, Chapter II.

<sup>2</sup> A division carried out by de Roberty in the classification of the special social sciences.—*La Sociologie*, p. 113.